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Fluer Adcock as an Expatriate Poet

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Abstract

This paper demonstrates with the expatriate poems of Fleur Adcock, who is a renowned British poet. Adcock is a poetess of variation, so, writes poems having different themes. But this research focuses only at her expatriate poems because not much research work has been done on her expatriate poems. Also, her poems deal with the diaspora and identity crisis. The reason for only choosing the theme identity crisis for this research is that, no poets of her time have written poems on such theme. Adcock being a part of settler colonies, faces more identity crisis because it is engrained in her through the process of settler colonialism.

Keywords: Expatriate; poem; Fleur Adcock; identity crisis; diaspora.

Introduction:

Fleur Adcock was born in the year 1934. She born in New Zealand, but later emigrated to England in 1963. She has received many awards for her poetries like Buckland award (New Zealand) in 1968 and 1972, New Zealand National book Award, 1984 and many more. Out of which Queens Gold Medal received in 2006 by her is the most prestigious.

Adcock is a poetess of variation so, she writes poems on different themes. This paper mainly focuses on her expatriate poems. However, not all of her expatriate poems could be taken as a subject of the research so, in order to narrow down the research, to have a in-depth research on the particular theme chosen – themes of expatriation and identity crisis as expressed in her expatriate poems. Only four poems are chosen for this paper to do research on: *Naming-A Surprise in the Peninsula*, *Please Identify Yourself* and *Stewart Island*. All the four poems are chosen from the same book to relate to the theme of the research. The details about the background of her expatriate poems and a brief discussion about her overall work are also elaborated.

The reason for only choosing the theme identity crisis for this research is that, no poets of her time has written poems on such themes. Moreover, the problem of identity crisis is experienced by the people of our subcontinent too. For instance the Muslims of India, who immigrated to our country - Bangladesh suffers from an identity crisis as to whether to call them Indian or Bangladeshi. The people emigrating to other countries, do so for better living with the notion of living in their dream places, but once they are there, they know that they are doomed because they become rootless or homeless permanently.

Definition of the terms Expatriate, and Diaspora.

According to Britanica.com refers to any one banishing from one's country for an offense made. However, the definition provided by the Oxford Advanced learner Dictionary defines expatriate as a person who lives in a foreign country and this definition should be kept in mind for this research.

The word Diaspora originated from the Greek dispersion which means to scatter. However, the other meaning that it has which says moving to another foreign land from one's homeland should be kept in mind for this research.

Background of Adcock's expatriate poems and her overall work

Adcock is a poet of variety dealing with different kinds of themes like relationships, childhood, memories etc. Although, the subject of her poetry often deals with personal matters. Like her relationships and her own inner self, but they cannot be called confessional. However, the most striking poems by her are the expatriate poems.

The nature of her poetry creates a tendency for impressionability; its subject and tone is dependent upon the place and time she is writing in. Adcock is often referred to as "the expatriate poet" because her life has been split between New Zealand and England, both countries claiming her as their own. "The awareness of the split in her life makes Adcock concentrate on the present, leading to rich description and clear imagery. She often focuses on particular places, immediate and concrete, to suggest that which is missing, using the present landscape as a backdrop for the 'receding pictures' it emotionally evokes" (Feminist

Writers). This split between New Zealand and England resulted in identity crisis in her which is set as a background of her expatriate poems.

Studies related to the title of the research

In their research – Displacement, Diaspora and Geographies of Identities, Ted Swedenberg and Smader Lavie (1996) argued that there is no “immutable link” between cultures, identities and specific places. However, they further added that any person from a different culture is faced with questions like, “*Where are you from?*”, Rather than “*Who you are?*” The question further follow according to Lavie and Swedenberg’s work like - “What made you *here* from *there*?”

In his book *Fleur Adcock: Writers and their Work*, Wilson (2007) has said that Adcock is a poet from New Zealand but draws experiences from “dislocation” and “relocates” her work in the British literature. In their article *The years work in English studies*, Leigh Dale, Chris Tiffin, Richard Lane have said that though Adcock got a British identity, she never quite forgot New Zealand (pp-61).

Indirect and direct theories related to the expatriate poems of Adcock

Some perspective of the postcolonial theory, feminist theory and perspective of diaspora can be indirectly related to the title of the research.

Postcolonial criticism has emerged only in 1990s from the influence of the books- In *Other Worlds* by Gayatri Spivak (1987), *The Empire Writes Back* by Bill Ashcroft (1989), and *The Nations and Nationals* by Homi Bhaba (1990). The term postcolonial is used to cover all the cultures affected by the empirical process from the moment of colonization to the present day. This is because there is a continuity of pre- occupation throughout the historical process initiated by European empirical aggression.

Only a part of the postcolonial perspective can be used to indirectly relate to the expatriate poems of Adcock. The part which says: “Post structuralism is centrally concerned to show the fluid and unstable nature of gender and personal identity.”

This part can be indirectly related to the title of the research because; Fleur Adcock did have a ‘fluid’ and ‘unstable’ identity. She lost her permanent home in New Zealand and faces

identity crisis once in England as she says ‘first time an exile’ in her poem, please identify yourself. She emigrated to England and it was like an exile to her. She said once that “the question of my nationality is as significant as the question of my gender” (five modern poets, 1994).

Another part of the postcolonial perspective is indirectly related to this research which says: a valid and active sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation, resulting from “migration” or “voluntary” removal. Adcock emigrated to New Zealand to Britain has given her a feeling of a feeling of identity crisis, which in turn is reflected in her expatriate poems.

One development of the postcolonial theory called the settler colonialism is directly related to the expatriate poems of Adcock. Settler colonialism took place in New Zealand and as Adcock spent a greater portion of her life in New Zealand, she is affected by it. Details of the history of this theory and how it is directly related to the expatriate poems of Adcock are discussed.

Some perspective of the feminist theory is indirectly related to the title of this research as well. This theory evolved from the diagnosis of writers about the inequality of women and proposed some solutions. Some writers who influenced this theory are – Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* (1792), Olive Schreiner’s *Women and Labor* (1911), and Virginia Woolf’s *A Room Of One’s Own* (1929).

The part within the feminist theories which can be indirectly related to this research, which says that there is a significant difference in the language of women and they expresses their personal feelings in their writing. This part of the theory evolved from French feminist Julia Kristeva and Helen Cixous.

Adcock, being a woman demonstrates a different shape in her poems which are narrow or lean and are short. Through her poems she expresses her personal feelings and emotions, so, Adcock being a female, fits into this particular perspective of feminist theory.

Galyen Rubin (1975), a feminist says in her essay that “innate male aggression and dominance are at the root of female oppression. This perspective of feminist theory can be again used indirectly to analyze the expatriate poems of Adcock because, when Adcock was in New Zealand, she was given a warning to leave the country by keeping a dog “nailed to

her wall....freshly killed...”, which she says in the poem *Surprise In The Peninsula*. She was a single woman with children so this made her vulnerable and forced her to move to Britain. If she would not immigrate to England, she would not feel the identity crisis and may be would not write the expatriate poems.

The perspective of Diaspora is indirectly related to the title of this research too. Ashcroft in his book *The Empire Writes Back* (1989) has argued that *Diaspora* does not refer to the “geographical dispersal”, but also the vexed question of “identity”, “memory” and “home”. In other words, the process of Diaspora gives rise to the problems of identity, problems of claiming a home as permanent, which is apparent in the expatriate poems of Adcock.

Direct theory related to the expatriate poems of Adcock.

The settler colonialism perspective of the postcolonial theory will be directly used to analyse the expatriate poems of Adcock. This development emerged from the influence of the books – *History of Australian Literature* (1961) by H.M Green, collection of anthologies named - the new Oxford book of Australian poetry (Murray 1986), the penguin book of New Zealand verse (Curnow 1960), etc. the influential example proposed by D.E.S Maxwell (1965: pp-82-3).

The common themes of the literatures of settler colonies are of exile and physical confrontation with new home. This settler colonialism took places in New Zealand, Canada and Australia. The difference between settler colonialism and colonialism of our country is that the settler colonizers did not dominate the colonies economically like we were dominated. But the colonies faced a kind of prejudice from the colonizers, which resulted in inferiority crisis and a sense of identity crisis in the minds of the New Zealanders to a large extent.

Fleur Adcock, as a New Zealander suffers from similar kind of identity crisis which is put to her through the settler colonialism, which is evident in her expatriate poems. Other people who emigrate to a foreign land from their home land do face identity crisis, but Adcock is a part of settler colonies, faces more identity crisis because it is engrained in her through the process of settler colonialism. So, from the discussion, it is apparent that there is,

infract a direct relation with settler colonialism and the expatriate poems of fleur Adcock, so using this theory her expatriate poems will be analysed.

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